



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
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**on the occasion of  
WORLD OCEANS DAY**

**8 JUNE 2016**

***“Healthy oceans, healthy planet”***

The oceans have long captured the hearts and minds of people around the world. The mysteries of its depths, the wonder of its creatures and the power of its waves have fed our curiosity and imagination since ancient times. The oceans have played an essential role in human history, connecting peoples, driving trade and crafting our various cultures. We now also understand how important the oceans are to human survival, well-being and sustainable development.

The overall importance of the oceans cannot be understated. More than four billion people rely on fish for a substantial share of their protein intake. The oceans and the life therein are critical to the healthy functioning of the planet, as the oceans support essential biogeochemical processes, supplying, for example, half of the oxygen we breathe. Oceans contain some 250,000 known species and yet many more remain to be discovered – at least two thirds of the world’s marine species are still unidentified. The many species in our oceans also provides a number of medicines and biochemicals. Clearly, planetary well-being, as well as the health, wealth and survival of humans are closely intertwined with the health of the oceans.

The state of the oceans, and our relationship with them, are ever changing. As our human population continues to rise, so too do the demands placed on the oceans’ resources. Human activities continue to take an enormous toll on marine ecosystems, which are damaged by over-exploitation, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, destructive fishing practices and marine pollution. It is estimated that there will be more plastic than fish in terms of weight in the world’s oceans by 2050. The growing threat of climate change and its associated impacts such as sea-level rise and ocean warming, make it even more difficult for the oceans to adapt to these pressures, posing a direct threat to marine life, and the coastal and island communities and national economies that depend on it.

In recognition of the urgent need to reverse these negative trends and to support the oceans in underpinning sustainable development, countries adopted, in 2015, Sustainable Development Goal 14, which aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and emphasizes the strong linkages between marine biodiversity and broader sustainable development objectives. Goal 14 further echoes and reiterates the many ocean-related elements agreed to by countries under the Convention on Biological Diversity through the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.



**Convention on  
Biological Diversity**

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Global goals and targets are only one piece of the puzzle and must be coupled with tangible on-the-ground action. There have been promising developments in certain areas, including the expansion of marine protected area coverage thus enabling the achievement of Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, which calls for conservation of at least 10 per cent of marine and coastal areas by 2020. For example, this past year Chile announced the creation of the Nazca-Desventuradas Marine Park, which will be the largest marine reserve in the Americas.

Despite the bright spots, there is an urgent need to scale up efforts and successful approaches if we are to achieve all of the Aichi Targets by the 2020 deadline and fulfill the vision of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 which aims to ensure that “by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.”

The Sustainable Development Goals and the Strategic Plan and its Aichi Targets lay out an ambitious agenda for achieving a future in which ecosystems are able to provide critical services that underpin planetary well-being, and in which the global community can sustainably and equitably benefit from biodiversity without impacting the ability of future generations to do so. All elements of society have a role to play in realizing this agenda. Conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and its resources should factor in to decisions that we make each day; marine biodiversity must be ‘mainstreamed’ into decisions we make about our food, our medicines, what we do with waste, and how we use the oceans for recreation and economic development.

As such, the forthcoming thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention will focus directly on the theme of “Mainstreaming Biodiversity for Well-Being.” At this meeting, Parties will consider ways to better mainstream biodiversity into key sectors such as fisheries and aquaculture, and will also address important ocean-related issues including the description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) in the world’s oceans and seas, a voluntary specific workplan on biodiversity in cold water areas within national jurisdiction, practical guidance on preventing and mitigating the impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity and habitats, measures to reduce the impacts of anthropogenic underwater noise and the use of tools such as marine spatial planning to inform proper planning and management of marine areas.

Likewise, the global community must make use of the opportunities presented by many other promising developments at the global level. The recent adoption of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the ongoing discussions under the United Nations General Assembly regarding a new international instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and the forthcoming high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, to be held in 2017, all represent clear opportunities to further mobilize political support, catalyze action and bridge gaps among various sectors and stakeholder groups to truly realize the change that we need to see.

The oceans are not simply a concern for scientists, fishermen and governments, they are our global heritage that we all have a stake in protecting, preserving and sustainably managing, and in doing so, ensuring our own survival and well-being.

I invite you to use the opportunity of this year’s World Oceans Day to consider the important role that each of us play in ensuring the long-term health and well-being of the world’s oceans. We have the knowledge, tools and resources to change course for the future. We must make use of them, and take actions now to ensure the future we want, a future of life in harmony with nature.

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